

REMARKS/ARGUMENT

Applicant responds herein to the Office Action dated October 9, 2002. A Petition for Extension of Time (one month) and the fee therefor are enclosed.

Preliminarily, the applicant hereby affirms the election made by applicant's representative telephonically on September 27, 2002.

Claims 1-2, 9-12 and 17-19 stand rejected on grounds of anticipation by Wu (5,256,204). Claims 1-6 stand rejected on grounds of anticipation by Imahashi (5,695,564). Claims 13-16 are stated to be obvious over Wu '204, further in view of Ogata (6,313,903). Reconsideration of these rejections on art is requested in view of the amendments to the claims herein and the following remarks.

Substrate production entails a series of steps performed by different processing stations or units, as is well known. The various production steps entail the creation of various features and characteristics of the finished product that, in the ideal case, should be examined, inspected, tested and verified for each part that is produced.

Therefore, substrate processing and production facilities also incorporate testing stations. While testing each substrate being produced as to each aspect, feature and characteristic thereof would be of great benefit, the production of substrates which are often produced in hundreds of thousands, if not millions of units, also implicates the cost of the production. The testing process therefore must be minimized in order to allow a manufacturer to be competitive in the marketplace.

The present invention, particularly as defined in independent claims 1, 9, 12, 17 and 20, constitute an innovative compromise of the aforementioned considerations. More specifically, each of the independent claims recites performing on each substrate being produced in a given lot, at least one of a plurality of inspections that are available and further specifies that each type of test that is available is utilized relative to at least one of the substrates. Moreover, to realize the economic goals expressed above, the claims further recite that not all of the tests are performed on all of the substrates.

The aforementioned expression of the invention is based on the disclosure in Table 2 of the preferred embodiment which is set forth at page 16 of the specification. Parenthetically, the

example of Table 2 is more limited than the inventions defined in the independent claims. For illustrative purposes only and referring to Table 2, at least one of the available inspections is performed on at least each of the 25 substrates to be subjected to the same processing. Moreover, and independently of the foregoing, each of the available inspections is performed on at least one of the 25 different substrates that are being processed.

The invention does not require performing all of the inspections on all of the plural substrates that are included in the particular lot. This allows for a good balance to be attained between proper inspections and processing time.

The primary reference, Wu '204 (which has been used as an anticipatory reference against several of the claims), and the secondary reference, Ogata '903, disclose semiconductor manufacturing apparatus or systems, including inspection units. However, neither of them discloses or suggests the above-described features recited in the amended independent claims of this present application.

The Office Action also utilizes Imahishi '564 as an anticipatory reference against claims 1-6. That reference similarly does not describe the invention set forth in each of the independent claims for the reasons set forth above.

The Office Action specifically references Figure 8 of the '564 patent and contends that it teaches, relative to the plural substrates, that they "...are subject to the same processing and said transport robot transports each of part or all of said set of plural substrates to a single inspection part selected from the plurality of inspection parts, thereby transporting at least one of said set of plural substrates to each of said plurality of inspection parts." The applicant respectfully traverses this assertion. In fact, with the structure as shown in Figure 8 of Imahashi, all of said set of plural substrates to be subjected to the same processing are transported to all of the inspection units (U3a, U3b, U3c) where inspections are performed. This amounts to each substrate having each test carried thereon which enormously extends the processing time of the manufacturing system and renders it non-economical. Moreover, Imahishi does not disclose or suggest transporting the substrates in such a manner that assures that each inspection unit has at least one substrate from the plural substrates it transported thereto under any and all conditions.

Based on the foregoing, it is believed and respectfully submitted that each of the independent claims defines over the cited prior art for the reasons noted above. Therefore, the rejections under 35 U.S.C. §102 and §103 should be reconsidered and withdrawn.

Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider the application, allow the claims as amended and pass this case to issue.

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service with sufficient postage as First Class Mail in an envelope addressed to: Asst. Commissioner for Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231, on February 10, 2003

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Name of applicant, assignee or
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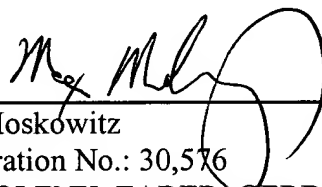


Signature

February 10, 2003

Date of Signature

Respectfully submitted,



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